

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

July 1 – 31, 2006

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and in New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Web site at <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf> or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on either Web site or interested parties may sign up to receive this update electronically by visiting <http://www.azgfd.gov/signup>. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency, cooperative effort among the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT), the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife.

Due to current denning behavior and the sensitivity of den location information, the latest wolf distribution map will provide wolf pack home range information rather than the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations. To view this map, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. Under “Mexican Wolf Conservation and Management,” scroll down to the links under “Distribution.”

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the AGFD’s 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 1-800-352-0700.

Numbering System: Mexican wolves are given an identification number recorded in an official studbook that tracks the history of all known Mexican wolves. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 18 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate wolves younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter “A” preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purposes of the Monthly Update, a “wolf pack” is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and are reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of July, the collared population consisted of 22* wolves with functional collars dispersed among nine packs and three single wolves.

* See the Meridian (new release) Granite, and Nantac packs below for more detailed information.

SEASONAL NEWS

In addition to the Meridian pack released this month with pups, the IFT has continued to document denning behavior in seven packs and has confirmed pups in the Rim pack in Arizona and the Luna and Saddle packs in New Mexico.

NEW RELEASE

On July 6, project personnel captured AM806, AF838 and two 12-week-old pups, f1028 and m1029, at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility. They gave the animals physical exams and vaccinations. They fitted AM806 with a radio telemetry collar and fitted AF838 with a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) collar. Later that day, IFT members transported the pack, named the Meridian pack, to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in Arizona where they placed the pack in a temporary holding pen near Middle Mountain. Later that day, the pack chewed its way out of the nylon mesh, low-impact acclimation pen, and has remained in the vicinity of the release site. On July

16, the IFT located evidence indicating the mortality of m1029. The IFT last confirmed m1029 to be with the alpha pair on July 14. As of July 31, the IFT has confirmed that f1028 is still with the alpha pair. On July 22, the pack was involved in an incident with a dog at a local residence (see “Incidents” below for more information).

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, M990 and m991)

Due to the condition of the carcass, a necropsy was not able to determine the cause of death for Bluestem AM507, found dead on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR) on June 4. The animal had no broken bones indicating a vehicle collision or evidence of a gunshot wound. The IFT located AF521, along with M990 and m991, throughout July within the pack’s traditional home range in the eastern portion of the FAIR and the west-central portion of the ASNF. Despite the loss of AM507, AF521 continues to exhibit denning behavior and is typically accompanied at the den site by M990 and m991.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range east of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. Project personnel have not observed denning behavior in this pack this year.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

Throughout July, the IFT located the Rim pack within its traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF. On July 9, IFT personnel observed two pups.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903, m927 and AM796, with a non-functional collar)

During July, the San Mateo pack continued to utilize areas east of Escudilla Mountain near the Arizona/New Mexico border. While project personnel have yet to observe pups, AF903 continues to exhibit denning behavior.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and uncollared AM512)

Throughout July, the IFT located the Aspen pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. While project personnel have yet to observe pups, AF667 continues to exhibit denning behavior.

Granite Pack (collared M859, f923 and f924)

Throughout July, the IFT consistently located members of the Granite pack separate from each other.

For most of July, f923 and f924 remained in the Gila Wilderness, but project personnel located them several miles apart. In the latter part of July, the IFT located f923 south of Pleasanton, NM, and numerous residents observed it along Highway 180. F923 then traveled approximately 10 miles northeast towards Mogollon, NM, where it was again observed numerous times along Highway 808. On July 17, during an aerial telemetry flight, the IFT located f924 outside the Gila Wilderness in the southern portion of the GNF.

M859 continued to make wide-ranging movements, and, at times, project personnel located it temporarily outside the BRWRA boundary. On July 12, IFT personnel confirmed that M859 was involved in a depredation incident (see “Incidents” below for more information). As of the end of July, project personnel located M859 inside the BRWRA boundary.

Luna Pack (collared AM583 and m925 and uncollared AF562)

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as yearling m925, remained within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF. On July 16, IFT personnel trapped m925, and replaced its radio collar with a GPS collar, then released it on site. On July 23, IFT personnel observed five pups and an uncollared yearling with the Luna pack. On July 28, IFT personnel confirmed that m925 and an uncollared yearling were involved in a depredation incident (See “Incidents” below for more information.)

Middle Fork Pack (collared F861 and M871)

Throughout most of July, the IFT located these two wolves together in the central portion of the Gila Wilderness. Telemetry flights located the pair together on July 3, 10 and 17; however, on July 24, they were five miles apart.

Nantac Pack (collared AF873)

On July 6, IFT personnel lethally removed AF873 in the GNF of New Mexico, per a USFWS Permanent Removal Order issued on June 17, due to repeated depredations. The Nantac pack removal effort is now considered complete.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797, AM732 and m1007)

During July, the Saddle pack continued to use its traditional home range areas in the southern portion of the GNF. On July 21, IFT personnel trapped AM732 and m1007. They fitted AM732 with a GPS collar, and they replaced m1007's pup collar with a GPS collar, then released both animals on site. On July 24, IFT personnel observed five pups with the Saddle pack.

INCIDENTS

On July 12, an IFT investigation confirmed that a wolf killed a calf outside the BRWRA boundary in New Mexico. The IFT attributed this depredation to M859, as it was the only known collared wolf in the vicinity. Because the depredation occurred outside of the BRWRA, IFT personnel initiated trapping efforts, but ceased when they found M859 traveling over 30 miles east of the depredation site. M859 briefly returned to the vicinity of the depredation; however, it continued to travel extensively, ending the month back within the BRWRA boundary.

On July 22, the Meridian pack, released July 6, was involved in an incident with a dog at a residence. The dog received injuries, but has recovered. IFT personnel have been monitoring the pack intensively, and have and will continue to haze should the pack approach a residence or exhibit other undesirable behavior. For additional information on thresholds for management responses to Mexican wolf nuisance behavior, see Standard Operating Procedure 13.

On July 28, IFT personnel confirmed a depredation involving m925 and an uncollared yearling of the Luna pack. Evidence indicates that the Luna alpha pair was not involved. This is the first confirmed depredation for m925 and its uncollared sibling.

On July 31, the IFT received a report of two injured dogs within the BRWRA in New Mexico. IFT personnel investigated the incident that afternoon. Upon arrival, one of the dogs had been euthanized due to its injuries. An evaluation conducted by WS personnel confirmed the injuries to the euthanized dog to be consistent with a wolf interaction. The second dog had been bitten in the hind-foot and also had injuries consistent with a wolf interaction. WS personnel could not determine the exact location of the incident due to recent heavy rains. While the IFT did not document any known collared wolves in the vicinity at the time of the incident, the owner reported having previously seen sign of a wolf in the area.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On July 6, project personnel captured AM806, AF838 and their two pups, m1028 and f1029, at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility and transported the pack to the BRWRA where they placed the animals in a temporary holding pen (see "New Release" for more information). Also on July 6, project personnel captured the remaining wolves at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility, M1008, M863, M732, alpha pair AM730, AF638 and their seven pups, 1031, 1032, 1033, 1034, 1035, 1036 and 1037, and transported them to the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility. This transfer temporarily emptied the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility to allow the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge staff to perform necessary maintenance to the existing pens.

On July 12, project personnel captured M636 at the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility, and transferred it to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On July 7, Shawn Farry provided a presentation on the wolf project near Alpine, Arizona, to 30 students from Cottonwood Gulch, New Mexico.

On July 14, Shawna Nelson provided a presentation to 12 members of the Southeastern Arizona Butterfly Association in Greer, Arizona.

On July 15, Shawna Nelson, in conjunction with AGFD Region III personnel, provided a public presentation to approximately 30 individuals as part of a community lecture series in Prescott, Arizona.

On July 21, the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) held a public meeting in Reserve, NM. Discussion topics included translocations and new releases of Mexican wolves in 2006; depredation and wolf management activities; 5-year review of the reintroduction project: USFWS response; and other business. The purpose of the AMWG public meetings is part of an ongoing process and commitment by project cooperators to keep the public informed on issues and actions pertaining to the Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project.

On July 27 and 28, the 2006 Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan Annual Meeting and Reunion Binacional sobre el Lobo Mexicano was held in Alpine, Arizona, and hosted by the California Wolf Center. Project personnel provided a field trip to participants into the surrounding BRWRA.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Nothing new to report.

REWARDS OFFERED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the conviction of the individual(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of Mexican gray wolves. A variety of public interest groups are offering an additional \$35,000, for a total reward amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents in Mesa, AZ, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, AZ, at (928) 339-4232, or in Albuquerque, NM, at (505) 346-7828; the White Mountain Apache Tribe at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-4263. Killing a Mexican wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and/or not more than one year in jail, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.